

# 12 FRAGEN AN ... 12 QUESTIONS TO ...

... INGRID KISSLING-NÄF

## 1. From your point of view, what are today's most pressing environmental problems?

In my opinion, the most pressing environmental problems are climate change and the overexploitation of natural resources such as water, soil, clean air, metals, and sources of energy. The growing economy as well as the growing population are putting the environment under increasing pressure. This makes it even more important to use resources sparingly and think in terms of cycles.

## 2. When looking at potential improvements in our environment, what gives you hope?

I am hopeful because of the ecological, economic, and social impact of the sharing economy: by sharing resources, members of a community create great social benefits. Political achievements such as the nuclear phase-out in Switzerland and the Paris climate agreement are also important steps in this direction. In addition, technological innovations such as 3D printers will have a significant impact on production.

## 3. Is there a particular environmental policy reform you admire the most?

I continue to be enthusiastic about the ways in which communities organise their use of common goods such as water, forests and knowledge. How can we organise ourselves as a community to ensure that we meet the needs of people in the long-term without overusing resources? Current examples such as *mobility.ch* for car sharing or flat-swapping are social innovations that have changed – and will continue to change – behavioural patterns and modes of consumption.

## 4. Which trend in environmental policy and politics do you consider an aberration?

Aberration may be a little bit strong here but politicians have failed in their attempt to introduce energy taxes that reflect actual environmental costs and lead to a real change in consumer behaviour.

## 5. Why environmental research?

Humans interact with their environment and change it. Environmental research explores these interactions and their long-term effect on both the environment and human beings. In so doing, this research makes an important contribution towards a better understanding of living conditions today and in the future.

## 6. What has been your experience when it comes to transferring scientific insights into practice?

Over time, I've come to see that people are becoming more and more interested in scientific findings. I've learnt that it's very important for researchers to interact with society. Open science, and the collaborative version of citizen science, enable volunteers to collect data. They can define and explore research questions together with researchers and thereby make research more socially relevant. This development is promising, particularly for the health sector, but also when it comes to the environment.

## 7. Besides the one you're working in, what field of research in the environmental sciences do you find most exciting?

I'm particularly interested in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to practical problems. I'm enthusiastic about innovation theories, disruptive developments and new technologies that make significant contributions to resource efficiency and behavioural change. A key word in this context is social innovation. As opposed to technological innovation, social innovation aims at generating new behaviours in view of great social and ecological challenges. It's often a non-commercial, bottom-up phenomenon. Good examples of social innovation are fair-trade products and neighbourhood initiatives.

## 8. Can you name any person or event that has had a particular influence on your commitment to environmental issues?

I was politicised by the debates surrounding nuclear energy, especially by the planned nuclear power station in Kaiseraugst in Switzerland in the 1970s. It wasn't realised due to public opposition. As a scientist, I was strongly influenced by discussions with Elinor Ostrom, whose doubts about state-controlled intervention seriously challenged my views as a young political scientist. I was inspired by her theoretical and methodological commitment to the commons and her great admiration for systems that successfully manage common resources, including Alpine pastures in the Swiss mountains.

## 9. What knowledge about the environment would you like to pass on to young people?

We have to take responsibility for our actions. The environment is constantly changing and will re-stabilise in the very long term. But, for example, the rate at which the climate is changing today is very fast. It's not enough to be aware of this – we need to be willing to question our behaviour in daily life. We can do this in a variety of ways, some more playful than others, for example, by measuring our ecological footprint.

### 10. As a scientist concerned with sustainability, what contradictions do you face in everyday life?

The contradictions are very mundane. I don't drive a car but I do like to travel, so every now and then I find myself sitting in a plane.

### 11. What are you reading at the moment?

Gender equality and diversity issues continue to be on my mind. I'm reading Iris Bohnet's book *What Works*, in which she calls for "gender equality by design". The book focuses on unconscious biases and behavioural design to create new environments. The aim is to overcome old patterns and improve diversity and lives. I'm also reading *The Sharing Economy* by Arun Sundararajan, who offers insights into the potential effects of "crowd-based capitalism", an approach that could replace owning by renting. It is very unclear at this moment in time if we will find new avenues for self-organisation and what impact these developments might have, for example, on our welfare system.

### 12. Apart from the ones we've raised here, what is the most important question of our day?

As a researcher and citizen, I'm very much concerned with the question of how we can collectively facilitate the transformation towards a more sustainable society. What conditions do we need to create and what can we offer from a social science perspective? And to what extent do ongoing digitisation and the sharing economy support or accelerate this process?



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Born 1964 in Basel. Studies in theology, economics, and political science. PhD in economics, St. Gallen. 1996 to 2001 Assistant Professor of forest resource economics. 2001 to 2007 Secretary General, Swiss Academy of Sciences. 2007 to 2010 Head of Innovation Promotion Agency CTI. 2011 to 2013 Head of Resource Efficiency and Innovation, Ernst Basler + Partner. Since 2013 Head of the division *Humanities and Social Sciences*, Swiss National Science Foundation, Bern. From 2018 Director Department of Economics, University of Applied Sciences Bern.

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**Selected memberships:** Nationalparkkommission | Beirat für genetische Ressourcen der deutschen Bundesregierung | Member of the City Council of Bern (since 2014) | Delegate Swiss Committee UNICEF (since 2015).

**Selected publications:** Vollzug und Wirkung öffentlicher Politiken. In: *Handbuch Schweizer Politik* (Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2014; with S. Rieder, A. Balthasar) | *RessourcenEFFizienz Schweiz REFF. Grundlagenbericht zur Ressourceneffizienz und Rohstoffnutzung. Schlussbericht* (EBP, 2012; with K. Bernath, C. Seyler, D. Fussen) | *The Evolution of National Water Regimes in Europe* (Kluwer, 2004; with S. Kuks) | *Institutionelle Regime natürlicher Ressourcen in Aktion* (Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 2003; with P. Knoepfel, F. Varone) | *Good Governance für eine zukunftsfähige und innovative Umwelt- und Ressourcenpolitik* (GAIA, 2002; with K. Kern).

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### INGRID KISSLING-NÄF

After her career as a researcher at Swiss Graduate School for Public Administration Lausanne and as assistant professor at ETH Zurich, Ingrid has acquired extensive management and leadership skills in a broad range of institutions, including public and private research organizations, national academies and research funding agencies, and within public administration. She has reorganized and repositioned these organizations nationally and internationally. In 2018, she will leave the Swiss National Science Foundation and will become the new director of the Department for Economics at Bern University of Applied Sciences. In addition, she has been engaged in politics (as a council member in the City of Bern) and served as a board member of many non-profit and academic organizations.

Her work has focused on three topics. First, she launched and supported inter- and transdisciplinary approaches and methods such as policy-science interfaces at the Swiss Academy of Sciences. After leaving academia, her work has rather focused on influencing national and international debates, for example, on climate change issues. Second, innovation and learning were topics already in her early career when her work still focused on basic discussions in public policy and administration. Today, her interest has shifted to debates on social innovations in theory and practice, particularly at the local level. Third, resource management and efficiency have always been central aspects in her thinking. Starting with research and teaching in

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the fields of resource economics and forest policy at ETH Zurich, she developed not only conceptual approaches, but soon shifted her interests to more practical approaches such as establishing a national research network on resource efficiency.

Trained in economics and theology, Ingrid's thinking was certainly influenced by her research stay at the *Workshop of Political Theory and Policy Analysis* in Bloomington, Indiana, especially by Elinor Ostrom's work on self-organizing systems, polycentric networks, and social capital, combined with Ostrom's deep skepticism with respect to the role of the state and hierarchical governance. Ingrid has taken up such ideas and translated them into basic and applied research such as the debate on resource regimes which is still a widely discussed approach in the academic literature, combining interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and integrated resource management. She has been influential in stimulating and positioning new topics, sometimes even ahead of time. Although she has left academia 15 years ago, her ideas are still present in today's discussions on natural resource management. Another characteristic is her strong interest in the impact of public policies, ranging from policy evaluations to her personal engagement in local politics. Thus, we can expect that she will use her new position at Bern University of Applied Sciences to stimulate, once again, new debates and timely topics in research and teaching.

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